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MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA REVIEW (U)
SUPPLEMENT
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Iraq: Baathist Crackdown on the Communist Party
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Iraq: Baathist Crackdown on the Communist Party (U)

The Iraqi Communist Party, buffeted for almost a year by the government's anti-Communist campaign, seems to be on the verge of withdrawing from or being kicked out of the Popular and Progressive National Front. The Front serves as an umbrella organization that provides the fiction of unified political support for the Baathist regime. Furthermore, the internal strains produced by the government's arrests, executions, and general harassment may produce a party split with a majority opting for membership in a clandestine Communist party. The Baathists' inability to tolerate opposition to their rule, no matter how small, could come back to haunt them if a new, underground Communist apparatus is able to exploit Shia Muslim and Kurdish grievances to weaken public support for the government.

Government Crackdown

The government's latest heavyhanded campaign to suppress Communist activities reflects the regime's willingness to take whatever steps are necessary to limit or eliminate the influence of real or imagined opponents. This particular outburst against local Communists, whom Baghdad believes are Moscow's cat's-paw, began last spring on the heels of the Soviet Union's successes in the Horn of Africa and Afghanistan. Iraqi strongman Saddam Husayn said in a Newsweek interview that the execution last May of 21 Communists convicted of having engaged in subversive acts in the armed forces was intended as a warning for the Soviet Union not to intervene in Iraq's internal affairs. The press has carried reports of more executions this December.

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Earlier this month the Baathist-controlled National Front issued a strong denunciation of Arab Communists, especially the Iraqi party. The statement charged the Communists with taking a soft stance on how to achieve peace in the Middle East and accused the Iraqi party of stirring up unrest among Kurds and Shia Muslims. (Iraqi Communists have long had strong followings in both of these groups.) This blast was followed by additional charges printed in a government-controlled publication claiming the Iraqi Communist Party was riddled with Zionists. (U)

Communist Response

The Communists have been powerless to repel the government's attacks, but they have taken some steps to minimize the damage. [redacted]

Iraqi Communists have also tried to line up some international support for their position from among Arab Communists, some West European media outlets, and the Soviet Union. [redacted]

[redacted] Iraqi Communists have safe haven in the USSR and Eastern Europe. [redacted]

[redacted] 30 March 1979

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